

Andrew Wright, *Untitled Photographic Pictures*, Patrick Mikhail Gallery, Montreal, March 20 to April 28, 2015

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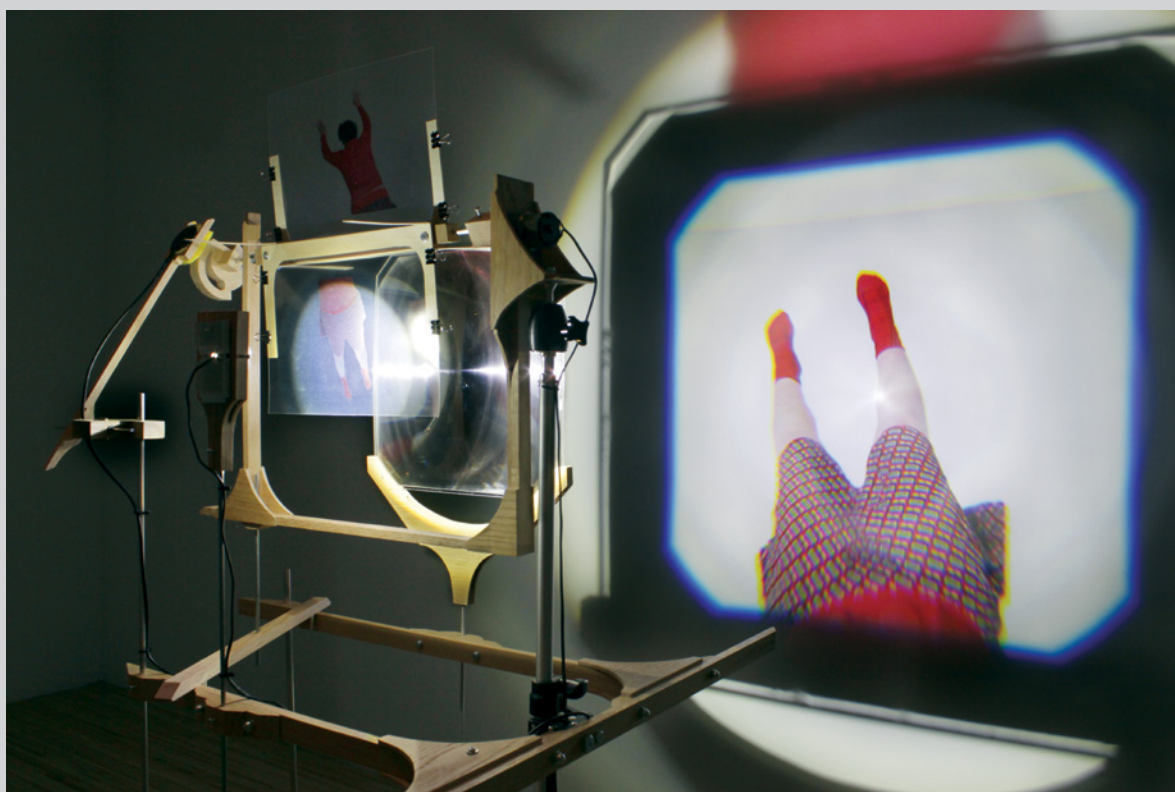
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Following this introduction to Labrecque's artistic vocabulary, I entered a room with video installations. *Touchée* (Affected, Touched; 2015, 4 min. 50 sec.), comprises a small, intimate video screen suspended in space, visible from both sides, with a drawing of two hands on one surface. A slightly unfocused black-and-white video shows a woman in a plain dark dress (the artist), her eyes closed, her arms and hands outstretched, slowly moving and seeking with hand gestures a sketch of her hands in magenta ink – clearly visible in front of the viewer. Sensing her way, the woman eventually discerns the correct alignment of her hands on top of the drawn ones. How does she do this? Evidently, the artist has tapped into the capabilities of her haptic, sensing body.

A large video projection, *Apprentissage* (Apprenticeship; 2015, 5 min. 56 sec.), presents two overlapping and aligned representations of a mute woman. One, a magenta outline drawn directly on the wall, remains upright and static, while the other, a very blurred black-and-white video image of the same woman, a ghostly "memory woman," moves; she holds and feels her head and torso, then crouches and lies down in slow motion. The two bodies become misaligned but nevertheless remain joined at the feet. The now-motionless horizontal figure is suggestive of death, and the question of two selves also becomes one of body-memory connections that have inter-generational implications.

The third room presents three kinetic sculptural installations that lie still, dark, silent, and in waiting, ready to surprise the viewer who triggers their audio and visual sequences on entering the space. It's a bit like entering a carnival funhouse: the cacophonous



Moulin à prières, 2015, kinetic and sound installation

overlapping, amplified mechanical sounds and rhythms are insistent, playful, and nonsensical; moreover, the room is sporadically illuminated by rotating transparencies depicting fragments of a woman dressed in red, enlarged and projected on the walls. The works' title, *Moulin à prières* (Prayer Wheel; 2015), references Buddhist prayer wheels rotating on spindles, the same motion as the revolving still images of the artist. In one work, she covers her face with her hands; in the second, three rotating images show

hands gesturing – clenched, open, and extended as if giving or receiving; and in the third, two images separate the upper and lower body; they all swing rapidly into view and then recede as if flying through the air into darkness. The overall effect is ironic; what do all the mechanical gestures and rituals amount to? They appear empty of genuine spiritual meaning and speak more of alienation and dislocation, while nevertheless maintaining an honest individual human presence.

Judith Parker is an Ottawa-based curator and art historian. Recently, she completed a residency at Elsewhere Living Museum in North Carolina and co-curated Beyond the Edge: Artist's Gardens 2014 at the Experimental Farm, Ottawa.

1 A description of the artist's drawing method is found in the exhibition statement, footnote 9, written by curator Nicole Gingras. Labrecque refers to these drawings as "sensation images."

Andrew Wright

Untitled Photographic Pictures

Patrick Mikhail Gallery, Montreal
March 20 to April 28, 2015

In recent years, Ottawa-based artist Andrew Wright has produced numerous bodies of work that propose new readings on the ontology of the image. In particular, Wright's exhibition at Patrick Mikhail's new Montreal gallery space, titled *Untitled Photographic Pictures*, presents a series of large-scale photographic works and two mixed-media sculptural works that underscore the artist's continued effort to use classical motifs and methods as a means to access broader questions concerning the medium of photography itself.

In this series of photographs, Wright opens up a rich interpretive space by taking the motif of the empty landscape



Untitled Photographic Pictures, 2015 inkjet print, 152 × 229 cm



Untitled Photographic Pictures, 2015 inkjet print, 152 × 229 cm

and making it strange. Each photograph is a direct-from-camera snapshot taken through the window of a moving train. As he passes by the landscape, Wright makes a deliberate jerking motion with the camera that causes the otherwise clear, focused image to be interrupted. This destabilizing movement leaves the viewer continually distanced from the “original” landscape. Within the confines of the gallery space, these visual disturbances, or “knots,” are immediately apparent to the viewer; yet, the images, captured in a moment between documentation and abstraction, are not clearly revealed. At first glance – without consulting the exhibition text, for example – one might assume that the artist has digitally edited these images to arrive at an ideal formal state. However, the critical viewer will not read these photographs simply as either completely “untouched” or “altered,” but will consider the ways in which the photographic impulse itself is always already held in a tension between composition and incident. The queerness of Wright’s arrival of the image is related to his broader interest in shifting the conversation away from representation or iconographic content and toward process itself.

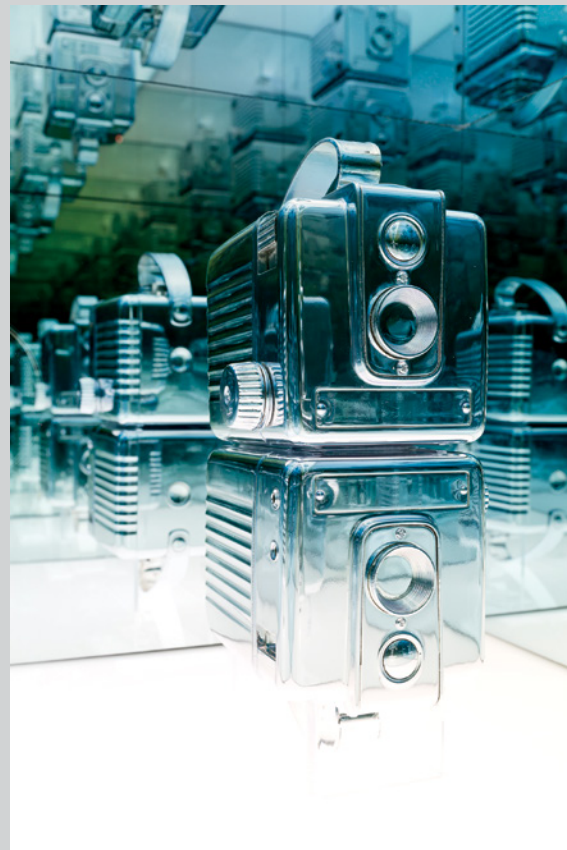
Wright demonstrates a kind of romantic staging of the photograph that blends realism and artifice. Furthermore, a certain kind of playfulness motivates his decision to raise the seemingly commonplace disposable snapshot to the scale of a history painting. On the one hand, this gesture seems to be a comment on our cultural understanding

of what constitutes a valuable image; on the other, the scale and pristine formalism of these works can be seen as a point from which to call attention to the objecthood of both the photograph and the camera. Of course, these photographs “look” toward the landscape, but when we consider the performative act of taking the snapshot, they speak to a far more rudimentary and fundamental set of questions about the medium itself. Here, Wright’s series evokes neither an outright minimalist nor an expressionistic practice, but a kind of intimate, self-reflexive conceptualism.

Elsewhere in the gallery space, Wright presents two separate mixed-media sculptural works that focus on the materiality of the camera itself. With *Disused Twin Brownie Hawkeye Cameras*, for example, Wright has cast two outdated Kodak Brownie cameras in silver and stacked them in a custom plinth. At first glance, this work seems to comment on the idea of the readymade by taking an obsolete and inexpensive piece of technology and turning it into a valuable commodity object. But taken further, we must also consider that in this silver casting, the camera and the lens are completely obstructed and shut off from the world, no longer an object to view from, becoming instead an object to be viewed. Looking more closely at the work, we also find that the cubic structure that houses the object is in fact a closed circuit of mirrors, reflecting inward and producing an infinite series of repetitions of the image of the silver camera. With the sculpture trapped

within this impenetrable hall of mirrors, Wright stages a subtle role reversal of the camera, as it becomes a closed circuit of information – a sort of double negative of visibility.

Untitled Photographic Pictures thoughtfully articulates a sense of care for the image that cuts across Wright’s oeuvre.



Disused Twin Brownie Hawkeye Cameras, 2015, Silvered objects, custom plinth

To reflect back on and emphasize the title of the exhibition, Wright is not simply taking photographs as a detached spectator, but – an important distinction – creating pictures by intentionally blending old and new photographic technologies and processes. In this interstitial space between realism and artifice, and between the commonplace and the formal, *Untitled Photographic Pictures* seems to suggest a slowing down of our now-regularized hyper-exchange and -consumption of images through various Internet technologies. What begins as a search for meaning within the photographic image itself is at the same time a question about what sharpened sensitivity or awareness will carry over to the viewer as she or he leaves the gallery space.

Adam Barbu is an independent writer and curator currently living in Ottawa. He has organized contemporary art exhibitions nationally and internationally that explore themes of cultural memory, the politics of spectatorship, and alternative modes of public engagement. His current critical research focuses on queer theory, “post-AIDS” discourses, and early minimalist art.
